

Stolen: One Mephisto Waltz

Ottawa Citizen, May 15, 2008

Janina Fialkowska's 'glorious' recording received raves, but for another pianist, writes STEVEN MAZEY.

Canadian pianist Janina Fialkowska had her *Mephisto Waltz* stolen,

and though she doesn't recommend the experience, she says she consoles herself that she's in good company.

Fialkowska, the Montreal-born pianist who returns to Ottawa for a concert Sunday with the Chamber Players of Canada, is among dozens of pianists, including fellow Canadian-Marc-André Hamelin, Yefim Bronfman and Vladimir Ashkenazy, who had their recordings passed off in recent years as the work of little-known British pianist Joyce Hatto.

Hatto, who died in 2006 at 77, had a modest career and had been away from the stage for 30 years when she died. In the last few years of her life, her husband, William Barrington-Coupe, issued more than 100 recordings he claimed she had made, through his own label. There were rave reviews, and critics said she was a major discovery, unfairly neglected by the establishment.

Early in the saga, one reason for the excitement over Hatto was a 2002 Liszt CD that included the *Mephisto Waltz No. 1*. In music forums, piano buffs talked about an exciting performance by a pianist who should be better known.

Rave reviews of other Hatto CDs appeared in *Grimphone* and other publications. A *Boston Globe* critic called Hatto

"the greatest living pianist almost no one has heard of."

The scam was revealed early last year, after musicologists and sound engineers used computer software and classical recording databases to match the Hatto discs with the pianists who actually made the recordings. There were headlines around the world about the hoax.

After the news broke, British newspapers reported Barrington-Coupe had run recording companies in the 1950s and '60s that specialized in taking recordings by established artists and re-releasing them as budget releases, under fictitious names.

A feature about the story in *The New Yorker* last September listed some of the pianists who had been the sources for the Hatto fakes, but said musical detectives had not yet identified the pianist "in the glorious recording of the *Mephisto Waltz*." Fialkowska received an e-mail a few days later from one of the piano experts investigating the fraud. He informed her that it was her recording from the early 1990s, a disc that had received enthusiastic reviews, that was the source for the Hatto disc.

From her home in Connecticut, Fialkowska, 57, says she's appalled by the whole story.

She says she had heard about the case before she knew she was involved, "and I thought it was horribly distasteful, sort of a sick thing, though I suppose he's too old to be thrown into jail. He was just a small-time crook. I think it's all rather sad."

But she says she tried to find humour in the incident. "Half of me was saying, 'Well, they were saying such nice



PETER SCHWAF

Janina Fialkowska performs Sunday at St. Andrew's Church.

things about it in *The New Yorker*, but the other half was saying yuck. But I'm in fantastic company," she laughs.

Fialkowska said she and her husband, concert presenter Harry Oesterle, were also amused over what the Hatto story revealed about music critics' whims.

One critic who raved about "Hatto's version" of a Rachmaninov concerto had been decidedly unenthusiastic 15 years earlier when he reviewed the

certos No. 11 and 12, performed by Fialkowska with violinists Manuela Milani and Jonathan Crow, bassist Murielle Brunneau, violist Guylaine Lemaire and cellist Julian Armour.

Their concert Sunday, presented by the Celebridée program of the Canadian Tulip Festival, will include Mozart's arrangement of the *Concerto No. 13 in C major*, K. 415.

She describes that concerto as "a little jewel that is rarely played," and says performing the chamber versions of the concertos offers more time for rehearsal and more freedom in performance.

"When you play with orchestra, you're lucky if you get two rehearsals. It's nobody's fault. It's just the money. With our group, we can rehearse for four or five hours.

"And secondly, there's a transparency. Because I'm not against an orchestra, I can use far more colours and the string players all become soloists. Things that maybe get hidden with a full orchestra come out much clearer when the string players are soloists."

Fialkowska will also join the group for Schumann's *Quintet for Piano and Strings*, which she says "is the perfect balance to the Mozart. It's something big and Romantic. What I love about the quintet is that it's a real group thing. With so many quintets it's almost like a piano concerto. This quintet is a wonderful blending of everyone."

The concert will also include the string players in music by Sir Ernest MacMillan and Godfrey Ridout.

Next season, Fialkowska returns to Ottawa to perform Mozart's *Concerto No. 24* with the National Arts Centre Orchestra.

"That one is quite a different thing. You just couldn't do that one with just strings. You need the power of an orchestra. I just

love playing that piece. It was one of my warhorses, forever, one of the greatest pieces ever written. It's operatic, it's dramatic, it's everything."

In a free event tomorrow at 3 p.m. in the Tulip Festival Mirror Tent in Major's Hill Park, Fialkowska will chat with Eric Friesen, host of CBC Radio's *Studio Sparks*.

Among the topics they're likely to discuss will be Fialkowska's successful return to the stage in 2004 after the removal of a tumour in her left arm, a muscle transplant, and extensive physiotherapy.

Fialkowska says she tries to limit her rehearsal time to about three hours these days but can go longer with breaks. "But my arm is holding out extraordinarily well," she says.

Critics have said Fialkowska sounds better than ever, and she says long after doctors said her arm would stop making progress, it continues to improve and enable her to tackle increasingly demanding pieces.

"I'm playing the second *Scherzo* of Chopin this year, which I couldn't do last year. So it means I'm learning how to compromise with things, or the new muscle is actually strengthening."

She says she's cut back on the number of concerts she presents each year, not because of her arm, but as a natural part of getting older and wanting more of a home life.

"My illness made me rethink things. I'm doing about 30 concerts a year now, and that's plenty. That's just fine," she says.

"I only play stuff that I love, the stuff I really want to play. I want every concert to be a special occasion."

Janina Fialkowska and the Chamber Players of Canada perform Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at St. Andrew's Church. Tickets and times: 613-599-3267 or www.cdnpitickets.ca